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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000704

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/MARCHESE/HARDING, STATE FOR NEA/ELA,
NEA/FO FOR ATACHCO

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI FEELS GOOD ABOUT FRENCH AND BAD
ABOUT SYRIANS

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) In a 5/15 meeting with A/S Welch, MP Saad Hariri reported with satisfaction about the start of his relationship with French President Sarkozy, which Hariri interpreted as a promising sign of continued French support. The Syrians, however, continue to worry Hariri. Having blocked the government, tribunal, and parliament, the Syrians will now try to disrupt the Lebanese presidential elections. In Hariri's view, the U.S. should not support any presidential candidate by name but should send strong messages of support for Lebanese democracy. Lebanon, in Hariri's view, is prototype for Iran. If Iran succeeds in Lebanon, then Bahrain, Qatar, and other Gulf countries are next. Talking about the UNSCR drafts then circulating in New York, Hariri pronounced the U.S. approach superior than the current French proposal, which left too many problems down the road. Hariri expressed hope that POTUS would "work the phones" to help get the tribunal resolution approved. Hariri commented that FPM leader Michel Aoun should be given a last chance to change sides from opposition to pro-government forces. End Summary.

UPBEAT ON FRENCH RELATIONS
AFTER SARKOZY-CHIRAC MEETING

2. (C) Saad Hariri, Member of Parliament and leader of the Mustaqbal party, met on May 15 with visiting NEA A/S David Welch. The Ambassador, Econoffs, and NEA Staff Assistant accompanied A/S Welch. An upbeat and fit-looking Hariri was wholly positive about his recent meeting and follow-up telephone call with French president-elect Nicolas Sarkozy. The Sarkozy meeting, which included President Jacques Chirac, confirmed for Hariri that the special relationship between France and Lebanon will continue and that the "chemistry is still good." Hariri said that Sarkozy assured him by phone that he, like Chirac, would push other countries on the tribunal.

CONTINUED WARNINGS ABOUT SYRIA

3. (C) On the other hand, Hariri expressed concern that Syria was "too confident." He said that the Syrians had followed a consistent policy since autumn: no government

(with the Shia walk-out), no tribunal, and no Parliament. Now, in the same vein, the Syrian regime "will not let us have the presidency" and may go as far as trying to create a second Lebanese government. Although the Syrians have time before they need the parallel government, they are already attempting to discredit PM Siniora, escalating the rhetoric that calls him "Israeli" and a U.S. tool.

14. (C) Hariri believes that the campaign to discredit Siniora began after Hariri's interview with Al-Arabiyya, in which Hariri said that only a Presidential candidate from March 14 would be acceptable. Characterizing Hizballah as "masters of negotiation," Hariri explained that his decision to make such a statement was the first step in negotiations. He said that March 14 had made a mistake, which would not be repeated, when the group initially agreed to accept the notion of a 19-10-1 cabinet. Instead, they should have started with a proposal of a 21-9 split, and only later agreed to the reduction of their own representation.

SYRIA WILL STOP LEBANON'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

15. (C) Hariri then spoke of "echoes" from Syria, further evidence that Bashar al-Assad "won't allow" the presidential election. Commenting that the issue of the special tribunal will "hopefully be settled in the next week to ten days," Hariri then said that he sees the Syrians looking at the "political void" of an empty presidency and whether to use this to provoke civil unrest. Hariri admitted that he did not know where the Iranians stood. He argued that the Syrians are "comfortable" with the current situation because nothing serious has been done to constrain them from acting however they wish in Lebanon. Besides having meetings with

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the Israelis via Abe Soliman, the Syrians believe that their cooperation over the issue of the Iraq-Syria border will give them a bargaining advantage in asserting their "stake" in Lebanon.

16. (C) Although Hariri said that he knows that the U.S. will not give in to Syria, he believes that the Syrians think the U.S. will soften its stance on Lebanon. But Hariri also questioned the value of U.S. sanctions against Syria. He mentioned that in a recent visit by Speaker Pelosi and her accompanying delegation, Congressman Lantos had referred to more sanctions, which have not yet been imposed. Hariri said he had met with the Iranian ambassador just prior to receiving A/S Welch. Hariri said he told the Iranian ambassador that if the Syrians prevent presidential elections from taking place, the Syrians will gain more of a hold over Hizballah.

WHAT IS THE U.S. MESSAGE?

17. (C) Hariri said that the highest priority for the U.S. in Lebanon should be sustaining a clear message about the presidential elections. He recommended that the U.S. line should be, "We are all for democracy, but we don't want to interfere". The U.S. should not support any particular candidate; everyone should be on the same level. At the same time, the U.S. should tell the Syrians to support the tribunal, respect UNSCR 1701, and stop the infiltration of arms into Lebanon. Hariri, in arguing that the Syrians are focused on preventing the Lebanese presidential elections, observed that there are other things that "make them crazy" now. Among those issues are a speedy resolution to the Palestinian problem and engagement on terrorists moving through Syria to Iraq. Pushing these issues will reinforce to the Syrians that their behavior in Lebanon and elsewhere needs to change.

LEBANON IS PROTOTYPE FOR IRAN

¶8. (C) Hariri noted that he sees Lebanon as a test case for Iran. If the Iranians can succeed in transforming Lebanon into an Islamic religious state, then they will succeed in the Gulf. Currently Iran is attempting to appease the Gulf states in order to buy time so that they can focus on their fight with the U.S. Hariri said Iran will "go all the way" for a nuclear bomb.

TRIBUNAL PROPOSALS BEFORE THE UN

¶9. (C) Hariri then discussed the two draft proposals then in circulation for moving the tribunal forward in the UN Security Council. He said that he talked to President Chirac and explained that the U.S. proposal, while it contained some problems, was better for the Lebanese than the less detailed French proposal that pushed some problems off until later. He suggested attempting to move forward with the U.S. proposal, and only going to the French version if the U.S. draft failed to gain agreement. He asserted that the French proposal, if implemented, would quickly lead to further blockages over issues such as funding and location. Cyprus, he stated, is an unacceptable site since it is a "hub for (Syrian) intelligence." Hariri expressed satisfaction with A/S Welch's explanation of our tactics and timing for moving the tribunal forward.

SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSAL

¶10. (C) In discussing PM Siniora's letter to UNSYG Ban, Hariri explained that Siniora had earlier sought the needed cabinet approval. Waiting for the right time, Siniora determined to move after the French election but before Chirac left office, and with the support of both Chirac and Sarkozy. Hariri mentioned without elaboration that a misunderstanding with the Russians deriving from Siniora's telephone call with Putin had subsequently been cleared up. Saying that "people like to be talked to," Hariri urged that President Bush "work the phones" and call Brussels, Pretoria and other UNSC member capitals to gain support for the tribunal resolution. The Saudis are talking to the Russians. President Mubarak called Hariri to tell him not to change anything on the tribunal, and promised to talk to the Russians. A quick resolution will pressure the Syrians.

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LAST CHANCE FOR AOUN

¶11. (C) Discussing other pressure points, Hariri agreed that General Michel Aoun should be given a last chance to change sides in Lebanon's domestic political standoff. Hariri said that Aoun's supporters are more susceptible to appeals for changing sides than Hizballah's supporters, since they travel outside of Lebanon. Hariri suggested that Aoun be "pounded with threats." The pressure of Maronite Patriarch Sfeir on Aoun is also helpful. Finally, U.S. mention of Elie Skaff as a presidential candidate might help.

FINAL THOUGHTS

¶12. (C) When asked for suggestions about the post-meeting press statement, Hariri jokingly suggested, "Nuke 'em!" (referring to Syria) as the best response. He quickly pointed out that Arab moderates are supporters of the U.S. and of the Arab peace initiative. "I am proud of our relationship," he said. In his statement to the press, he said that the meeting revolved around discussions of how to move forward on the issues of the tribunal and the Arab initiative as it was recently endorsed again in Saudi Arabia.

¶13. (U) This message has not been cleared by A/S Welch.
FELTMAN